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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3351
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6747
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4480
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 3099
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7626
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1698
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5034
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1241
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7366

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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Arab Initiative, Syria/Iraq, Syria/ Russia, Syria/Israel,
Lebanon, Palestinian Territories (4/19)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on Apr. 19 reported that an Arab League Ministerial Committee on the Arab peace initiative held a meeting in Cairo on Apr. 18 with the participation of FM Mouallem to review efforts to activate the peace initiative in light of the Riyadh Summit. The Committee called for formation of an Arab delegation including Syria, Saudi Arabia, Palestine, Lebanon, Qatar, Jordan, Morocco, and the AL Secretary General, to propose the Arab viewpoint on means of activating the Arab peace initiative. The committee decided to hold continuous consultations on how to revive the peace process on all tracks to achieve a comprehensive settlement according to a timetable.

Papers also reported that an international conference on Iraqi refugees wrapped up deliberations on Apr. 18 at the UN Headquarters in Geneva. The participating countries called on the world community to shoulder responsibility in helping Iraqi refugees and the countries which host them until a political settlement is reached in Iraq that provides refugees security. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Antonio Guterres said "the participating countries were unanimous in acknowledging the large burden Syria is bearing due to the arrival of Iraqi refugees who seek protection in Syria." On the sidelines of the conference, Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad met US Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey. During the meeting, the US official expressed appreciation for the positive Syrian spirit in dealing with the Iraqi refugee problem. She expressed her country's desire to continue dialogue with Syria to cooperate in solving this problem.

On Syria-Russian relations, papers reported that FM Mouallem met on Apr. 18 with Alexander Sultanov, special envoy of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Talks dealt with bilateral relations and regional developments in Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine. In a press statement, Sultanov stressed Syria's central role in achieving security and stability in the region and described the meeting as "very good." He said the two sides exchanged views on the situation in the region and Lebanon and how to help the Lebanese come out of the crisis they are currently facing. The Russian official said that discussions also dealt with the Arab-Israeli conflict in light of the results of the Arab summit and the meeting of the follow-up committee in Cairo.

Independent al-Watan on Apr. 19 featured a statement to Israeli

radio by Israel PM Olmert on Apr. 18 saying that his country has no intention to attack Syria this summer. He told the Knesset Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee that "Israel has no intention of attacking any Arab country this summer. We will defend ourselves if we are attacked."

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"Syria participates in an Arab ministerial delegation to promote the Arab peace initiative. Arab Foreign Ministers call for an international conference to launch direct negotiations on all tracks" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/19)

"Arab Foreign Ministers: No to free normalization, no to amending the [Arab] Peace Initiative" (Independent al-Watan, 4/19)

"FM Mouallem reviews bilateral relations and regional developments with Alexander Sultanov, Special Envoy of President Vladimir Putin. Sultanov: Syria has a pivotal role in achieving stability in the region" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/19)

"The Geneva Conference highly appreciates Syria's positions regarding the Iraqi refugees. Deputy FM Miqdad and US Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey reiterate the importance of

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treating the Iraqi refugee problem" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 4/19)

"US Assistant Secretary of State Ellen Sauerbrey confirms to Miqdad the desire to continue dialogue with Syria" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 4/19)

"Former Lebanese Minister Michele Smaha calls for Lebanese

reconciliation over the International Tribunal. President Emile Lahoud: Violations by the al-Saniora cabinet have caused the critical situation in Lebanon. Hizbollah: Walid Junblatt is an expert in corruption and violation of law" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/19)

"Olmert denies his intention to attack Syria this summer" (Independent al-Watan, 4/19)

"The UN Security Council calls for dispatching a mission to monitor Syrian-Lebanese borders" (Independent al-Watan, 4/19)

"Israeli occupation forces attack Majal Shams in occupied Golan" (Independent al-Watan, 4/19)

"Another catastrophic day in Baghdad: Hundreds of casualties in several terrorist assaults" (Government-owned Tishreen, 4/19)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"The Arab-Israeli Conflict Turns into Show Business"

Former Syrian Information Minister Dr. Mahdi Dakhlallah commented in government-owned Tishreen, on (4/19): "The Arab-Israeli conflict has entered the domain of show business: Twice-monthly meetings between Olmert and Abbas -- lights, cameras, handshakes, smiles, and sometimes kisses....

"But the philosophy of show business will not be confined to the Palestinian-Israeli 'relationship'. It will cover the entire Middle East.

"We will soon see activities by the Arab Quartet, and TV cameras will be there. Meetings between this quartet and the international quartet, attended by Israelis and Palestinians, might also be held. Some Arab official will then find himself 'compelled' to talk with the 'Israeli side' on the sidelines of this or that meeting 'for the

sake of the Arab peace plan.' This way, normalization will enter from the window after it found the door closed.

"And then only the problem of Syria and the Lebanese and Palestinian resistance will remain....

"Here, Americans and Israelis will work hard to turn these negotiations, too, into show business. There will be cameras and lights (didn't you, Syrians, ask for public negotiations?). Surely there will be no cordiality and smiles, but this is no problem, for dramatic programs are also a kind of show business.

"And as happened in the nineties, the negotiations will drag on uselessly, and we will again come out empty-handed. In the meantime, normalization will have taken its course and become reality.

"We might find ourselves in Syria without helpers. Arabs will tell us: Here you are negotiating, and you must arrive at something. The United Nations will ask us to play a 'constructive' role. Forces of the Lebanese resistance and the Palestinian resistance will be in the position of a desperate defense of their existence, and their adversaries will be local forces, not Israel directly.

"Show business is not all about lights and glamour. There are certain benefits for the United States and Israel to reap, mainly, scoring a political victory on the rubble of a military failure in Lebanon (July) and Iraq and devoting their time to 'the Iranian question.'

"Syria's experience in the past five years has certainly been useful. Even the European media admitted that President Asad has managed the crisis in an astonishingly smart and wise manner and emerged victorious. I believe our success in the next difficult experience is also possible if we use new-old tools: resistance

backing the negotiations and the need to set a time-limit for any future negotiations."

"Marginal Results and Wrong Signals"

Mihriz al-Ali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (4/19): "The meeting between Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert did not produce any serious results concerning the Palestinian People's fateful issues, such as the removal of the occupation, the return of the refugees, the end of settlement activity, the release of prisoners, and the future of Jerusalem....

"Such meetings are held in response to a US desire.... They give wrong signals that serve Israel.... The meetings polish the image of the Israeli government, which is practicing all forms of terrorism against the Palestinian people, and improve Olmert's popularity, which has hit rock bottom. They also give the world public the impression that the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis is moving in the right direction, which conflicts with the essence of the Israeli policy, a policy based on the continuation of settlement activity, attempts to impose partial solutions and separate deals unilaterally, and rejection of final-status negotiations and discussion of any substantive issue of concern to the Palestinian people....

"Such meetings will not enable the Palestinian people to regain their legitimate rights. Rather, they serve Israel's needs and objectives of perpetuating the occupation and evading the requirements of a just and comprehensive peace...."

"Lebanon, a Different Destiny"

Waddah Abd-Rabbuh, Chief Editor of independent

al-Watan, commented (4/19): "When the anti-Syria forces in Lebanon, supported by the French and American presidents, failed in their efforts to isolate Syria on the Arab and international levels, they changed their tactics and turned to the UN Security Council to establish the International Tribunal on the al-Hariri assassination under Chapter Seven of the UN Charter....

"This means not only internationalizing the Lebanese political situation, but also mortgaging the entire Lebanese foreign policy to the superpowers that control the Security Council....

"The internationalization of the crisis would paralyze Lebanon politically, economically, and socially for months and perhaps years and foil Arab attempts to find a solution to the crisis...."

Corbin